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A CHARGE

DELIVERED TO

THE CLERGY OF THE UNITED DIOCESES OF CORK,
CLOYNE, AND ROSS,

AT THE PRIMARY VISITATION,

In October, 1857.

BY

WILLIAM FITZGERALD, D.D.,
BISHOP OF CORK, CLOYNE, AND ROSS.

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A C H A R G E,

ETC.

MY REVEREND BRETHREN,

I MUST begin by expressing my regret that circumstances have delayed our meeting to a later part of the year than I would have chosen, if free to make a choice. I am confident, however, that you will readily pardon a delay which has been the result of unavoidable accidents, and accept the assurance that, in all the affairs of the diocese, my sincere wish is to prefer your convenience to my own.

And, now that we have met at last, it is in a time of gloom and anxiety, when it has pleased God to permit the interests not only of Great Britain as a State—but of the Christian Church, of civilization, and of humanity, to be imperilled by that treacherous and terrible blow struck in Eastern India, which has filled all hearts with anguish and alarm.

Amidst the scene of horrors which has been so suddenly opened to our view, we cannot but derive some comfort from the reflection that the Church, as such, seems wholly clear from the blame of having provoked them by any indiscretion of its ministers—and *that* by the general confession of those who have given any attention to the subject.

At the commencement, indeed, when the dreadful news first broke upon us, there were some, who ought to have known better, who were inclined to throw a great share of the blame upon the operations of our missionaries; and these imputations, thrown out in high places, were naturally taken up and repeated by a crowd of more ignorant persons, belonging to a class—unhappily too numerous amongst us—who seem habitually to act and speak upon the principle that the only cause in which earnestness and zeal should be discouraged is the cause of Christ and His Gospel, and that the grand danger which threatens society is the danger of coming really to believe the religion which we all profess. But though the echoes of these hasty censures are still, every now and then, repeating themselves from those who have no voice of their own, and only give back more or less imperfectly what they have chanced to be supplied with by others, it is gratifying to observe that, even in quarters almost undisguisedly unchristian, the Church is generally acknowledged to be free from any deserved censure in this matter. In effect, as you know, the present outbreak has not taken place amongst that part of the population of British India to which the missionaries had access, but amongst those who were most jealously guarded from their influence; and so far as the immediate cause, or pretext of the mutiny, was religious at all, it was one in no way directly connected with any-



thing that the Church had done, or could do, but with a supposed interference, on the part of the State, with the superstitious laws of Caste that form a part of the Brahminical religion. In reality, however, I am convinced that the present work of massacre and outrage in Hindostan is no wild attempt, however misguided, at resistance to persecution, but is itself a persecution—as true, and surely as barbarous a persecution as any the Christian Church has ever undergone—and that the object aimed at is the extermination of the Christian Church and all European civilization from the whole peninsula. The Brahmins—from whom the soldiery of Bengal are for the most part drawn, and who have thus had nearly the whole armed force of the Presidency in their hands—the Brahmins and the Mahometans have come to feel that the religious fables and prejudices upon which their institutions, and consequently their power are built, cannot abide the presence of that light which Christianity and civilization bring with them, and necessarily must bring with them, wherever they penetrate. That feeling was perfectly just and reasonable. The Brahminical and Mahometan institutions *are* founded upon fables and prejudices that can only subsist in an imperfect state of knowledge and civilization, and can no more bear the presence of true science and religion than

Night and all her sickly dews,
Her forms obscene, and birds of boding cry—

can abide the presence of the dawn. And it was not unnatural, therefore, that men whose power and privileges were staked upon the maintenance of such fables and such prejudices should, when they thought they had the power, endeavour, as all the forms of Paganism have always endeavoured, to crush by violence the light that detected their impostures. So far, therefore, and only so far, as the labours of our missionaries had contributed to imperil the fabric of Hindoo and Mahometan superstition, by spreading the knowledge that was inconsistent with them, so far I must allow that they have done something to draw down upon our fellow-countrymen in the East the savage persecution now raging against them. But this is a provocation which Truth must always give to Error, wherever and however the two forces come into contact with each other: and one which we cannot withdraw, without withdrawing ourselves from India altogether, and leaving it in all the ignorance and folly in which we found it.

The time is gone by when men could dream of securing our empire in India by a jealous exclusion of European influences, by the open patronage and support of everything most loathsome and abominable in the idolatry of that country, and by practically renouncing our Christianity and even our civilization while dwelling among barbarians and unbelievers. Such a state of things was never otherwise than disgraceful and unrighteous. But now it is no longer even possible.

We can never regain our mastery in India without making ourselves respected there; and respected we can never be while we appear ashamed of everything most truly noble in ourselves, and affect a compliance with practices and institutions which every rational mind must regard as absurd, and every moral mind as degrading, cruel, and impure.

I do not mean that we should become persecutors in our turn; but I do mean, that if God should permit us to crush the present insurrection, prudence as well as duty will require that we should secure a full toleration for ourselves, our religion, and our institutions, and put away entirely the miserable and wicked dream that we can be justified in seeking to hold—on the precarious tenure of weak compliancy—some commercial and military advantages in Hindostan, by systematically withholding from the subjects committed to our care by Providence all the best gifts which that same Providence has enabled us to bestow. I do hope that it will be found in the issue that He who brings good out of evil in the counsels of His unerring wisdom will so order matters, that even these horrid calamities, that have caused the ears of all that heard the report of them to tingle, will be found to have accomplished a beneficial end—that, cemented even by the innocent blood that has been so ruthlessly shed, a nobler and more enduring edifice of British empire will yet arise in India, and long remain

a monument, not only of our power and wealth, but of our wisdom, our justice, and our goodness.

The former structure, which has sunk and been engulfed in this fearful earthquake, was, whether we regard its frame or its foundation, connected with many recollections which one would willingly forget. Let us trust that on its ruins will rise another and a better building, which Britons may never be ashamed to contemplate, and which hostile violence may never overthrow. Let us pray, above all things, that this temporary check to the progress of God's truth may be speedily removed, and that His Word may have free course and be glorified in those dark places of the earth which are full of wickedness and cruel habitations.

Fond, impious man, think'st thou yon sanguine cloud
Rais'd by thy breath has quench'd the orb of day ?
To-morrow He repairs his golden flood,
And warms the nations with a brighter ray.

For myself, I confess that, when I speak thus confidently of the final triumph of Truth over all the forms of error and debasement, my confidence is chiefly founded upon the conviction that the cause of civilization is indissolubly connected with that cause of Christ and his Gospel for the success of which we have the promise of Him who is the faithful and true witness, the Yea and the Amen for evermore.

If we looked only to experience, however, it may be plain that Truth has a *tendency* to triumph (as

the planets have a tendency to fly off at a tangent), experience also shows us so many and such unlooked-for checks upon this native tendency of Truth, that, in a melancholy hour, one is often tempted to conjecture that the final triumph of Truth may be indefinitely delayed. At such times it needs something shorter and more certain than the intricate disquisitions of philosophy to set us cheerfully at work in behalf of what may seem a failing cause, and enable us to persevere with hopefulness in a labour that appears for the present in vain. At such times especially it is consolatory to remember that, as part of Christ's Church, we belong to a Society which, however States and Empires may flourish or may fade, can never be destroyed, and is sure of ultimate success. “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord.”

I have regard not merely to such impediments as are caused by brute violence and persecution to the progress of Truth, when I speak of the necessity of cultivating in ourselves a calm reliance upon the promise of God as our best reliance under doubtful circumstances, but also to other hindrances which, from time to time, would dishearten the servant of Christ, if he guided himself only by the measures of outward success. There are every now and then

apparent flows, as it were, in the tide of human society which might raise unreasonable hopes, and ebbs that might inspire unreasonable fears, if our eyes were fixed only upon such appearances. But He that believeth shall neither make haste nor be ashamed.

In constant faith upon the promise of God, who will never desert His Church, nor fail to assist with His Spirit the means which He has Himself ordained, let us labour on sedulously and perseveringly in the path of duty, whether the surrounding scene be bright or gloomy. Let us keep our eye fixed upon the Oracle of God, and not draw auguries from the strange and changeable appearances that may burst out like portents from the troubled sky of politics. Whether we shall *see* the fruit of our labour here or not is not our concern, but that of the Great Master of the vineyard. He may give, or He may deny that reward to our faithful services; but there *is* a reward that we cannot miss but by our own fault; and in God's own due season we shall assuredly reap, if we faint not.

Let me occupy, then, the remainder of our time in some brief remarks on some of the ways in which, without any irregular or extraordinary efforts, the existing means which our Church and Constitution have provided may be most effectually used for the great end of the salvation of souls.

In the first place, let me impress upon you the primary duty of a constant residence upon your cures.

This lies at the foundation of our ecclesiastical system. Our clergy are not a moveable set of missionaries, sent to make, from time to time, visits for preaching and praying among the people of a district, but fixed pastors, dwelling among their own people, and making themselves ensamples to the flock. It is not enough that you should reside in a place where *you* can easily have access when you please to *your people*, but you should be in the spot where *your people* can, when they wish, have access to *you*, can send for you on emergencies, may see and know you, not merely in your pulpit ministrations and official visits, but in the intercourse of daily life as their friend and counsellor. And even in those cases where the mass of the population may appear so alienated from the Protestant faith as to leave little apparent hope of your direct usefulness as their spiritual guide, that circumstance will afford no excuse for absenting yourselves from your parish. It is your duty to be on the spot. You can never know, except you are there and on the watch, when a favourable opportunity of doing something for your Master may arise; and if any of His sheep are lost through your neglect, you know how terrible, to them and to you, will be the consequences.

Besides, regarded only in a temporal point of view, it is plainly the design of our constitution that the endowments of the Church should furnish to each parish at least one resident gentleman, who,

according to his means, should keep some decent hospitality, maintain the example of a sober and well-ordered household, afford some support and direction to the poor, and be a centre of intelligence and civilization in his own neighbourhood. The revenues, small or great, of each parish were designed to be spent in that parish. The benefits, small or great, which the residence of a pious and intelligent clergyman can confer were designed for that locality and not for others; and it is a plain defeating of the intention of the Church when this duty, which the law of the Church regards as *essential*, is wholly evaded or imperfectly complied with.

Every man who takes a living or a curacy—and no man is *compelled* to take either—takes it subject to this obligation, and, if he cannot overcome his repugnance to fulfil that obligation, that should be a reason for not undertaking it at all. “Every clergyman,” says Bishop Sherlock, “who is instituted to a parish cure does voluntarily undertake the office, and binds himself to perform it. The want of a convenient habitation may be a reason to refuse the living; but the inconvenience which they willingly submitted to when they took the living, can never be pleaded afterwards as a just excuse for neglect of the duty which they willingly undertook at the same time.” I do trust that before long the law will provide such effectual means for the building of glebe-houses as to cut off all excuse for the continuance of this scandal in our Church.

In the next place, I would remind you of the importance of celebrating frequently, and regularly, and solemnly, the public services of religion, and that whether your flock be large or small, rich or poor. A few poor people are just as much entitled to frequent opportunities of all the means of grace, and to the punctual and solemn performance of them, as the most brilliant congregation that was ever gathered in the most stately place of worship upon earth; and if they perceive any slovenliness or negligence in your manner of ministering to them, they will not fail to be tempted to regard you as an acceptor of persons, that looks not at the value of souls, but at the gold ring and the goodly apparel.

And in speaking of the frequency and solemnity of the public services, I would notice particularly the administration of the two Sacraments. I regret to hear that in too many cases a practice has prevailed in these dioceses of baptizing children at home, in cases where there is no valid reason for it recognised by the law of the Church. Such a practice is not only at variance with the plainest language of those Rules which we have all promised to obey, but attended with other great and serious evils. The rite of Baptism was intended to be a public monument and protest of our Christian faith, not a thing done in a corner. It is not a mere household ceremony, but the engrafting of a new member into the Church of God, the uniting him with the congregation of Christ's family: and

surely with such a rite, no circumstance should be omitted that can help to make the significance of the Sacrament more apparent. The careless and private ministration of it has a plain tendency to change it into a mere superstitious usage, demanded and witnessed with a vague impression that it *should* be done, but without any distinct notion of what it means, and for what it was appointed. You will do well, therefore, to impress upon your people that in the Sacrament of Baptism, as in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we meet together not as a family, but as a Church, and therefore in the place appointed for the assemblies of the Church, not in the midst of worldly associations, and perhaps the confusion of mirth or business.

In the case of the other sacrament, no one thinks of a similar careless administration of it in private, but I fear that in some cases the smallness of the number of the communicants is made a reason for celebrating it more seldom than if there were a greater multitude. It seems plain to me, however, that if that sacrament be a means of grace at all, four or five communicants have just as good a right to its frequent participation as four or five hundred; and that to act as if they had not is to run the risk of producing mischievously false impressions, and at least raising the suspicion that you neglect them because they are few and inconsiderable.

I own it is natural that a man of shining talents and great energies should feel disheartened when he finds his lot cast in a remote place and among few and ignorant people; and it is natural, also, that an indolent man should encourage himself to do nothing, by the reflection that, after all, there is very little to be done.

These things, I say, are *natural*, but the Spirit of Grace was given to us to correct the failings of nature, and enable us to do our full duty in that state of life, whatsoever it is, to which it has pleased God to call us. And if we would more seriously reflect upon the model of pastoral care that was set before us at our Ordination, we should perceive that, even in the pastoral care of a very few persons, there is more scope for the exercise of our talents and our energies than is commonly supposed. If it be indeed our anxiety “to bring all committed to our charge unto that agreement in faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among them either for error in religion or for viciousness in life,” we shall find that this is no easy task with few or with many.

A clergyman who has a very numerous flock often finds it physically impossible to bestow sufficient time and attention upon the more ignorant and stupid of them, to bring them forward to any considerable proficiency of cultivation: but he who complains of the fewness of his parishioners cannot

allege that excuse. And if, where we have but few, where our interest is narrowed and confined to a very small number of individuals—every one of whom we can know familiarly—we would do our very best with that few—if, for example, we would endeavour to enable them all, adults as well as children, to read their Bibles with ease and intelligence, and make the study of the Holy Scriptures really interesting and instructive to them, by not merely practical remarks, but by explaining the sequence of the text, by pointing out the true meaning of obscure expressions and words apt to be misunderstood, and by adding so much of illustration and collateral knowledge of manners and customs, and history and geography, as we can get them to take in—if we would labour thus in private, and also in our sermons take pains to make hard things plain and easy, and engage not only the feelings but the understandings of our hearers—and if we would talk to our people about our sermons, and discover by judicious questions how far they could follow us, and where and why they went astray, and thus guard against mistakes, and acquire the power of addressing them in words within the reach of their comprehension—we should find that even a very small flock would afford large scope for most interesting as well as most profitable labour—profitable, I mean, not only to them, but also to ourselves. It is quite true that much of the preparatory education which is neces-

sary for making our hearers capable of being benefited by our discourses ought to have been bestowed upon them in their youth by the labour of the schoolmaster. But if you find yourself in circumstances in which you have the leisure and means of giving it to them now, and if it be necessary for enabling them to take in the instruction which you are primarily commissioned to deliver—if your discourses are as unavailing as if spoken in an unknown tongue without this, and if with it they will be intelligible and instructive—if you *can* give this necessary help, and if no one else *will*, need I say more to shew that you are bound not to despise the work because at first sight it may look beneath your dignity or really be repulsive to your tastes and habits. Certainly, if our boast be that we put the Bible, the whole Bible, into the hands of our people, we are guilty of a gross inconsistency, if at the same time we practically lead them to think that they need attend to, or strive to understand, no more than a few plain and obvious texts about some of the leading doctrines of religion.

Too often what is called the education of the poorer classes is merely this—they are taught very imperfectly to read, with hardly any intelligible explanation of the meaning of the words. Then, as they leave school, they are given a little Bible, printed so closely, and in so small a letter, that even a good reader would find the perusal of it irksome. They are exhorted to study it diligently, and so their

education ends. Now, surely it is worse than idle to teach children to read, if you do not seriously intend that when they are grown up they shall continue to read. And if you do intend that, are you not bound to go on, and give them something useful and interesting to read. You have created a capacity in their minds. You have made them intellectual beings. You are, as it were, the parents of their understandings: and you are bound to take means that the capacity which you have given them shall be neither starved by want of food, nor poisoned by unwholesome diet. If you leave them to seek for intellectual nourishment only in the vile trash which too often circulates under the name of cheap literature, you will find too late that you have created a gigantic but brutal and ferocious power which will in the end destroy both you and itself.

In large parishes, however, as I have said, it is often physically impossible that the minister should himself undertake the whole labour of even the strictly religious instruction of the people. He must, for example, in a large Sunday-school delegate some part of his office of instruction to others, and engage the assistance of lay-teachers in at least some of his classes. But even then he will almost always be able, if he pleases, to retain in his own power not only the inspection and direction of those whom he employs, but also the immediate instruction of them. He will be able generally to

arrange some fixed time for meeting the teachers, and, in a way that will not offend or disgust them, preparing and qualifying them for the duty which they have to perform. A pious disposition and a taste for teaching others are doubtless most valuable gifts, but it is not these only that can qualify a teacher; and, if really sound instruction is to be delivered in our Sunday and weekly schools, we must take some reasonable pains to ascertain that the persons by whom our children are there guided have really sufficient knowledge of the Scriptures, and of the formularies of our Church to discharge efficiently the solemn task they have undertaken. I would advise, therefore, that, wherever it is possible (and I cannot easily imagine a case in which it is not possible), you would form a class for the Sunday-school teachers, and meet them, from time to time, more or less frequently, as their and your occupations will allow. It will be necessary of course in such a class not to treat them as *children*, and to avoid with great delicacy whatever might hurt the feelings or check the zeal of those who are voluntarily coming forward to assist you in the important work of training up the young disciple. But still you must remember that you are responsible for the teaching which you sanction by your countenance, as well as for that which you deliver yourself; and you will—if with diligence and a loving spirit you set about it—make your people feel in time that the office of a Christian teacher in all its

forms is a privilege and honour not lightly to be undertaken, or capable of being efficiently discharged without some diligent preparation and sedulous care.

The mention of catechetical instruction for the young naturally leads me to say something of the rite of Confirmation, for which it is intended to prepare; and which so happily affords you an opportunity of giving a direct and personal practical application of your lessons to each child whom you have under your care. I need not in addressing you, my brethren, enlarge upon the nature, or the importance of that rite, by the institution of which the Church has solemnly put upon each of its members, as they come to years of discretion, the necessity of considering that it rests with each of them to determine whether or not they will accept for themselves the stipulations of the Christian covenant which were provisionally made for them at their baptism. But there is one point that I may be pardoned for pressing upon your attention, and through you upon theirs. It is this: that as well the reason of the case as the strict law of the Church makes it the plain duty of every one that is confirmed to receive, according as opportunity shall offer, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The participation of that Sacrament is not a privilege which some Christians may aspire to, and others do without, but the *bounden duty* of all who are capable of receiving it with faith, and

it is a manifest and audacious mockery of God for any one to come forward at Confirmation and declare his acceptance of the Gospel covenant on condition of keeping God's will and commandment, and walking in the same all the days of his life, without a steady purpose and resolution to obey, among the rest, that particular injunction of Christ, in which He has required His disciples to "Do this in remembrance of Him." In order, therefore, to mark more unequivocally the pressing necessity of this duty, I intend in all future years¹ that God may spare my life and strength to accompany the rite of Confirmation with the administration of the Lord's Supper, then and there, and thus tender to all who have come forward to profess themselves members of Christ and children of God an immediate opportunity of proving the sincerity of their love.

To this combination of a communion with the rite of Confirmation I have never heard any valid objection. It has been said, indeed, that the young persons cannot, in the excitement and hurry of a crowded Confirmation, be expected to be in a favourable state of mind for the reception of the Holy Communion, and that therefore it would be better to defer that to a quieter, though more distant

¹ This, I may observe, is no new or untried plan, but one long since adopted, with the happiest results, by the Archbishop of Dublin in his own diocese : and the working of which I have had opportunities of observing for the last twenty years.

occasion. But such objectors forget that there is no necessity at all for any hurry, or crowd, or excitement on these occasions; that, at least in this country, the number of our Protestant population is not so overwhelmingly great as to make it impossible—by making the occasions sufficiently frequent, and the stations sufficiently near and many—to avoid any troublesome throng, and consequent tediousness in the services; and that, if the applicants are not in a fit state of mind to receive the Lord's Supper, they cannot be in a fit state of mind to receive Confirmation either.

Unhappily, there *is* too commonly on such occasions an undue bustle and excitement; but this arises partly from an injudicious and unnecessary crowding together of too many young persons to one spot, and partly from the want of men's minds being sufficiently impressed with the solemnity of the service in which they are taking part. The first of these evils I hope to remove by administering the rite often enough, and in a sufficient variety of places to cut off all excuse for throng or bustle; and, in order to facilitate that, I shall expect that in the customary returns by the Rural Dean before Visitations, the number of young persons likely to come forward in each parish at the next Confirmation shall be noticed, along with that of the whole Protestant population. The other I must principally trust to your diligent exertions to remove also, by setting before your people the true

nature of the rite, and the awful solemnity of a transaction in which that baptismal covenant upon which our salvation depends is publicly ratified in the presence of God and His Church. And I cannot but hope also that the addition of another solemn service, which has never to the same degree lost its reverence in the eyes of men, will still further aid in checking all profane indifference. If indeed Confirmation were a mere *opus operatum*, like investiture with a blue riband, or the conferring of a degree, or the enrolling of a citizen in a mere secular guild or corporation, there would be nothing more necessary than outward decency in its performance; but when one regards it as the serious declaration of our personal adherence to the terms on which a vital union with Christ our Lord depends, as the solemn prayer of the whole Church, through its chief minister, for the strengthening presence and support of the Holy Spirit to assist those young soldiers of the Cross who are going out to do battle in the world under His banner against all the powers of evil, and whose everlasting happiness or misery depends upon the issue of the conflict, he will readily perceive that it is a rite which cannot be properly performed or undergone with any other sentiments than those of deep and sincere devotion, of solemn awe, and serious recollection.

THE END.

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